



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Farm and Foreign
Agricultural
Services

Farm Service
Agency

Dear CRP Participant:

In the next few weeks, you must make important decisions about your Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) contract that expires September 30, 1999. In making those decisions, I urge you to think about how you can preserve the conservation gains you have made over the past ten years. These improvements in soil, water, and air quality and enhanced wildlife habitat account for much of the program's widespread popularity.

The CRP's eighteenth signup period will be open from October 26, 1998, through December 11, 1998. During this signup, you can offer all or part of the acreage you currently have under contract that expires September 30, 1999, or other land if it meets the new eligibility requirements. Before making decisions about planting or participating again in the CRP, I strongly urge you to find out the facts about all the different ways CRP can enhance your land, water, and wildlife.

You may consider putting back into production some or all of your expiring CRP land or offering different land into the CRP. I strongly encourage you to consider devoting areas of your land to high conservation-valued practices, such as grassed waterways; filter strips; contoured buffer strips; riparian buffers, including marginal pastureland to be devoted to riparian buffers; field windbreaks; shelterbelts; or similar practices. The Farm Service Agency (FSA) will cost share with you to establish and maintain these practices. They are also considered CRP continuous signup practices, making them eligible to be enrolled at any time and without having to submit a competitive offer in the general eighteenth signup.

If you wish to offer cropped wetlands, cropland near wetlands, or land that is highly erodible and subject to the conservation compliance program into the CRP, you must do so during the designated CRP signup period. In submitting your CRP offer, make sure to choose the best type of cover for your land to ensure the highest conservation value. Your offer stands a better chance of getting accepted into the CRP if it contains high quality practices and cover to benefit water quality and wildlife and reduce soil erosion. Again, keep in mind that FSA will cost share with you to establish high quality cover and similar practices.

As you make these important decisions regarding your CRP acreage, please use the expertise available within the Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the local conservation districts. FSA staff can answer many of your questions. Natural Resources Conservation Service and conservation district personnel can consult with you about your land's eligibility for CRP, where certain practices or other programs might be used on your farm or ranch, and how to achieve maximum conservation benefits. Cooperative Extension Service specialists can provide advice on economic and agronomic questions relating to CRP participation. If you have access to the Internet, you can access the FSA Home Page at www.fsa.usda.gov for more information about the CRP.

For land that is leaving the CRP and returning to production, I urge you to meet with FSA staff before the expiration of your contract to discuss your eligibility for enrolling in the farm program and your obligations under the conservation and wetland compliance program provisions.

Sincerely,

